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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001499

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SUBJECT: SPANISH FM MORATINOS IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for reasons 1.4 b & d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the last week of July, Foreign Minister Moratinos met with top leaders in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria, including Syrian President Assad, in a declared effort to support US and European efforts in Palestine and Lebanon. According to MFA Middle East DG Alvaro Iranzo, Moratinos himself decided where to go and whom to meet with based on significant Spanish concerns that Lebanon is potentially on the brink of civil war and that the safety of Spain and other UNIFIL troops is at risk.

¶2. (C) Iranzo said that Moratinos was explicit in his meetings, as well as in public statements, that Spain supports President Bush's proposed Middle East peace conference as well as French FM Kouchner's initiative for a national unity government in Lebanon. Iranzo said that Moratinos was firm with Assad about the need for Syria to better control its borders and focus on the foreign fighter problem as it relates to both Iraq and Lebanon. Iranzo believes that the unified international voice on this issue may be starting to get through to the SARG. DCM told Iranzo that while we appreciate Moratinos' statements in support of the US and Quartet and accept that he undertook this trip in good faith, he sent an unfortunate message by meeting with a high-level Hizballah figure. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) DCM talked with MFA Middle East DG Alvaro Iranzo on August 1 about Moratinos and Iranzo's just-completed trip to the region. Iranzo, who had accompanied Moratinos to all meetings, said that Moratinos had decided to go to support US and EU efforts, and out of concern about the safety of Spanish troops serving in UNIFIL in southern Lebanon. Stopping first in Egypt, then going to Lebanon and Syria, Moratinos was clear in all meetings that Spain supports US and EU efforts towards peace in Israel and Palestine and welcomes President Bush's proposed Middle East peace conference.

¶4. (C) Iranzo said that the Lebanon stop on July 30 was most important. Moratinos had positive meetings with all key leaders, including PM Fuad Siniora, President of the Parliament Nabih Berri, Michel Aoun, Walid Jumblatt, and Amin Gemayel. Iranzo told DCM that Spain has invested a lot in Lebanon, including putting troops under UNIFIL, so Moratinos wanted to do what he could to support the UNIFIL mission and push Kouchner's national unity government initiative. Moratinos also met with Hizballah number two, Sheik Naim Qassem. After that meeting, Moratinos said publicly that "the meeting, which took place within the framework of the national dialogue we are supporting, has been very positive. A compromise is close to being found." Moratinos also had an emotional visit with Spanish troops serving under UNIFIL during which he commemorated the six Spanish soldiers who were recently killed in a car bomb attack.

¶5. (C) DCM expressed appreciation for Spain's good faith

efforts in UNIFIL and its statements in support of US and Quartet peace efforts, but expressed great surprise and disappointment at Moratinos' meeting with Hizballah. Even considering Spain's major stake in the area, Moratinos sent a confusing message, seemingly legitimizing an organization known for committing many terrorist acts and representing a major part of the problem in Lebanon. DCM said that while it might be tactically necessary for Spain to meet with low-level Hizballah representatives in Beirut, it was hard to understand how the Foreign Minister of a major European democracy would find it appropriate to meet with the deputy head of a terrorist group. Iranzo replied that Spain is conscious of the issue and generally limits its contacts with Hizballah to infrequent, low-profile meetings, but in this case Moratinos decided that Spain's commitment to a successful UNIFIL mission and to support the French initiative in Lebanon warranted the meeting.

¶6. (C) After Lebanon, Moratinos moved on to Damascus where he met with Syrian President Assad, Vice President Farouk Chareh, and Foreign Minister Mualam on July 31. Iranzo said that discussions centered on the need for Syria to support the French initiative in Lebanon as well as the importance of Syria taking action on the foreign fighter issue. He said that Moratinos made a strong pitch for better border control to keep foreign fighters out of both Lebanon and Iraq. (NOTE: The GOS believes that foreign fighters linked to al-Qaeda were likely responsible for the car bomb attack on its UNIFIL soldiers. END NOTE.) Iranzo said that the GOS believes that the SARG is beginning to get the message on foreign fighters and is taking seriously its leadership of a border control working group that will meet on August 10. He said that Moratinos had encouraged Syria to cooperate closely with Germany, which had offered to help. Iranzo said that

MADRID 00001499 002.2 OF 002

the Syrians told Moratinos that they had approached the US about attending this meeting as an observer. DCM thanked Moratinos for raising foreign fighters and asked Iranzo to ensure close coordination with the USG on this issue. He also reminded Iranzo of the importance of the international community delivering a consistent, unified message to Syria.

¶7. (C) Iranzo said that Moratinos told Syria that Spain supports Secretary Rice and Tony Blair's efforts on the Middle East peace process. Assad and FM Mualam suggested that the peace conference should be like the 1991 Madrid conference in which everything could be on the table in an effort to achieve a comprehensive peace.

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